

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 AF-06 NEA-09 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01

INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AID-05 COME-00 EB-07 FRB-03 TRSE-00 XMB-02

OPIC-03 CIEP-01 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 IO-10 ACDA-05

NIC-01 /114 W

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R 201745Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY ROME

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9665

AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

AMCONSUL ASMARA

INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 2560

NOFORN

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PFOR, IT, ET

SUBJECT: ITALIAN CONTACTS WITH ERITREAN INSURGENTS

1. MFA OFFICE DIRECTOR FOR SUB-SHARAN AFRICA PIERO RACHELE HAS CONFIDED TO US THAT THE ITALIANS HAVE HAD INFORMAL CONTACTS WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ERITREAN POPULAR LIBERATION FRONT (ELF) SINCE THE OUTBREAK OF HOSTILITIES IN ERITREA. THE MOST RECENT MEETING TOOK PLACE TOWARD THE END OF LAST WEEK IN BEIRUT.

2. IN THEIR CONVERSATIONS WITH THE ITALIANS, THE ELF REPRESENTATIVES HAVE GONE TO GREAT LENGTHS TO PICTURE THEMSELVES AS A RESPONSIBLE GROUP WHILE THEY PREDICTABLY PAINTED THE CENTRAL ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT (EPMG) IN HIGHLY UNCOMPLIMENTARY TERMS. THE INSURGENTS HAVE STATED THAT THEY REPRESENT NO RPT NO THREAT TO ITALIAN (OR OTHER FOREIGN) INTERESTS IN ERITREA IN
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CONTRAST TO THE EPMG WHICH HAS ALREADY ANNOUNCED THE

NATIONALIZATION OF ITALIAN FIRMS IN ASMARA. THE ELF REPRESENTATIVES HAVE DESCRIBED THEIR ORGANIZATION AS MODERATE AND NON-COMMUNIST AND HAVE INDICATED THAT IN THE EVENT OF THE EVENTUAL INDEPENDENCE OF ERITREA, THE ELF WOULD WELCOME AN INFUSION OF WESTERN CAPITAL AND TECHNOLOGY TO ASSIST IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE REGION.

3. THE ELF REPRESENTATIVES HAVE UNDERSTANDABLY EXPRESSED OPTIMISM OVER THE OUTCOME OF THE PRESENT HOSTILITIES. THEY POINT TO THEIR CONTINUED STRENGTH IN THE RURAL AREAS AND TO THEIR ABILITY TO DISRUPT OPERATIONS OF THE ETHIOPIAN MILITARY AND INDICATIONS OF THE SUCCESS THAT THEY HAVE HAD THUS FAR. THEY HAVE INFORMED THE ITALIANS THAT THEY WOULD VIEW AS A HOSTILE ACT A POSTIVE AMERICAN DECISION TO THE REQUEST OF THE EPMG FOR ADDITIONAL MILITARY ASSISTANCE. AT THE SAME TIME, THE ELF REPRESENTATIVES EXPRESSED AN INTEREST IN ESTABLISHING CONTACTS WITH THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT FOR THE PURPOSE OF EXPLAINING THEIR VIEWS ON THE SITUATION. RACHELE STRESSED THAT THE ITALIANS HAD NOT UNDERTAKEN TO SERVE AS AN INTERMEDIARY BETWEEN THE ELF AND THE UNITED STATES. NEVERTHELESS, RACHELE BELIEVES THE ELF REPRESENTATIVES ASSUME THAT THE ITALIANS WILL BE PASSING THESE ELF VIEWS TO WASHINGTON. VOLPE

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